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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 005023

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND EAP/MTS
NSC FOR GREEN
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP FOR ALLEN

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [MOPS](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: INDICATIONS OF COUP PLOTTING

Classified By: (U) Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Scott Bellard
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY. There are disturbing indications that recidivist coup plotter "Gringo" Honasan and opposition Senator "Ping" Lacson may be at the very least associated with plots against President Arroyo in conjunction with the Young Officers Union (YOU), a shadowy cabal of junior and mid-grade Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) officers. The AFP is aware of the possible threat, but its leadership does not appear overly concerned and committed to keeping the AFP apolitical. The nature and extent of YOU's support within the military is likely less significant than its supporters claim, but perhaps greater than we had realized, given that dissatisfaction in the ranks is reportedly growing. Any coup attempt would likely split the military, undermine reform efforts, and potentially trigger civil conflict. We have emphatically and repeatedly made clear that the United States firmly opposes any extra-constitutional action, stressing that any effort to overthrow the government would result in a cut off of US assistance and would have serious negative implications for the Philippines' international image and its investment climate as well. END SUMMARY.

THE HONASAN/LACSON CONNECTION

12. (S/NF) In an October 25 meeting with poloff, former Chief of Staff to then-President Corazon Aquino Oscar Orbus claimed to be a conduit to the Young Officers Union (YOU), a cabal of junior and mid-grade officers whom he described as "plotting against the government." (Note: This version of YOU -- also known as YOU-New Generation -- apparently has its roots in an earlier anti-Marcos Young Officers Union within the AFP. End note.) Orbus claimed YOU is an "army within an army," with its own command and battle staffs. He claimed that former Senator and recidivist coup plotter Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan (Philippine Military Academy '71) is one of YOU's "kuyas" (older brothers or senior advisors), as are two cronies of opposition Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson (PMA '71) -- Victor Batac (PMA '71) and Jake Malahakan (PMA '71) -- as well as Pastor "Boy" Saycon, who is associated with the left-leaning Council on Philippine Affairs (COPA). Notably, YOU's manifesto, dated July 21, 2005, can be found on Ping Lacson's website: www.pl.888.ph/articles/you.php.

13. (S/NF) Poloff emphatically told Orbus that the USG supported the rule of law and opposed all extra-constitutional action. He warned that any effort to overthrow the government or the elected President would result in a cut off of US assistance and jeopardize the ongoing defense reform program.

WAITING FOR THE TIME TO STRIKE

14. (S/NF) Orbus stated that YOU members believed that, because there is "no hope for reform," the AFP -- as the "protector of the people and the State" (as described in Article II, Section 3 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, he noted) -- "needed to do something." He asserted YOU's plans are 70-percent complete and that it was waiting for the right time to engage in a "constitutional rescue."

15. (S/NF) Orbus claimed that YOU had established a "tactical alliance" with the Left to remove President Arroyo from office. It hopes to isolate Arroyo loyalists -- he cited Philippine Army Commanding General LTG Hermogenes Esperon and Philippine National Police (PNP) Deputy Chief Avelino Razon -- to achieve a "bloodless coup" but was prepared to fight, if necessary. According to Orbus, the YOU plotters had already discounted any meaningful response from the PNP, believing YOU forces could "neutralize" the Special Action Force (SAF).

16. (S/NF) Orbus claimed further that YOU was one of many small groups plotting against the government, any or some of which might play a "starter role" in precipitating a coup attempt against President Arroyo. YOU would then seek to capitalize on any such effort to catalyze support for its own

cause, Orbus described. (Note: A recent article in the respected "Newsbreak" magazine quoted one AFP officer as claiming the AFP was now 70 pct against President Arroyo, a marked increase since July, the article noted. End note)

17. (S/NF) If it successfully seized power, YOU planned to abolish the Senate and House and establish an inter-regnum ruling council that would govern for 12 to 18 months before holding an election, according to Orbus. He claimed further that he was helping to shape the junta's agenda. "If it will happen anyway, I want to ensure a good product," he said.

AFP AWARE, BUT NOT CONCERNED

18. (S/NF) Colonel Carlos Holganza, Senior Military Advisor to Secretary of National Defense Cruz, separately told JUSMAG Chief on October 26 that the DND/AFP leadership is aware of YOU's activities, but is not overly concerned, believing the organization is fractured and not representative of the AFP's junior officer corps. He said that Secretary Cruz believed the best way to counter YOU was to continue to educate the troops and junior officers about defense reform. In an October 22 address to Philippine Military Academy (PMA) cadets, Cruz urged the AFP to focus on reform and stay apolitical.

19. (S/NF) Holganza noted that Brigadier General Danilo Lim, the current Commander of the Scout Rangers -- who had been a member of the earlier version of YOU and one of the leaders of the nearly successful attempt in 1989 to overthrow then-president Aquino -- now fully supported the Constitution. According to Holganza, BG Lim had the Scout Rangers -- which had participated in almost every coup attempt -- firmly under control.

10. (S/NF) COMMENT. We made clear to Orbus, as we have categorically and repeatedly in public and private statements to a wide variety of interlocutors for and against the current Administration, that we would forcefully oppose extra-legal and extra-Constitutional efforts to change the democratically elected leadership of this country. In addition to negative implications for USG assistance, we have highlighted the disastrous impact such efforts, successful or not, would have on the Philippines' international image and its investment climate. Any coup attempt would be a disaster for this still evolving democracy and its economy. It would pit the military against itself, undermine reform efforts, and potentially unleash a civil war, with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New Peoples' Army possibly seeking to reap the benefits. YOU's apparent ties with Lacson and Honasan are troubling but not surprising. Orbus, who sought this meeting and had originally hoped to introduce YOU officers directly to emboffs, appears to be another inveterate coup plotter who is maneuvering for a personal role. The nature and extent of YOU's support among serving military officers are likely much less considerable than Orbus implied, but perhaps greater than we had realized. However, Embassy at this time has no/no indication of any active coup planning among AFP units, and continues to believe that the senior AFP leadership in particular wishes to keep the AFP out of politics, as AFP Chief of Staff General Generoso Senga and Secretary of Defense Avelino Cruz have both stressed. We

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will continue to reinforce our message and hope that President Arroyo's still growing unpopularity (in and out of the AFP) and a self-destructive Philippine penchant for coup plotting do not lead to more foolhardy and damaging actions as described by Orbus.

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